

Poetic Echoes of failed Revolutions in 19th century Latin America and Southeast Asia – The Passionate Verses of José Martí and José Rizal¹

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Abstract: This study delves into the poetry of two prominent revolutionary figures and national heroes of the 19th century: José Martí, often referred to as the “Apostle of Cuba,” who authored 157 known poems, and José Rizal, celebrated in the Philippines as the “national hero” (pambansang bayani), whose collection of 40 long poems exists in both print and manuscript forms. Martí was born in 1853, and Rizal in 1861; during the following decades, they both embodied the revolutionary and nationalist fervor that opposed the declining Spanish colonial empire. Tragically, both men would perish without witnessing the realization of their revolutionary aspirations: Martí was killed in Cuba by Spanish soldiers during the failed armed uprising of 1895, and Rizal was executed in Manila on December 30, 1896. The Spanish empire ultimately fell two years later after its defeat in the Spanish-American War. Following this event, the United States occupied Cuba until 1902, subsequently facilitating the establishment of a Cuban national government that it controlled until the Castro Revolution of 1959. Likewise, the Philippines experienced nearly 50 years of occupation from 1898 to 1946. Although Martí and Rizal never met or corresponded, they were profoundly linked by a shared commitment to a revolutionary romantic poetry, which this research aims to explore and interpret.

Keywords: José Martí; José Rizal; Revolutionary Poetry; Spanish Colonial Empire; Romanticism; Failed Revolutions.

A contemporary examination of literary works by late 19th-century revolutionary poets encompasses numerous social and cultural variables, with the most prominent being the authors' political involvement.

1 This article is an expansion of a previous, more concise text presented at the 8th *International Conference of the Latin American Studies Council of Asia and Oceania (CELAO)* in Macao in 2018, titled “Reading Poems for Revolutions in 19th-Century Latin America and Southeast Asia: José Rizal and José Martí”.

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In this paper, the connection is quite clear. José Martí is widely regarded as a figure representing “a culture striving for independence from imperialism” (Said, 1993, p. 214), while José Rizal’s novel, *Noli Me Tangere*, published in Berlin, in 1887, has cemented his status as a “symbol of Philippine resistance to colonial rule” (Anderson, 2005, p. 6).

However, there may be more to their proto-revolutionary literary contributions than mere political symbolism. We do not aim to explore how their works are perceived today, as both Martí and Rizal are honored as national heroes in Cuba and the Philippines, respectively, and their cultural significance often ignites controversial political and ideological debates. The true importance of these two revolutionary writers lies in the profound influence they exerted on the literary world. Instead of delving into their specific roles in the revolutions that attempted to transform the colonial landscape, we prefer to present a brief inventory and research of poetic ideas clearly influenced by revolutionary ideals⁴. Before analyzing their poetic discourses, let us first reflect on the intrinsic connection between writers and the fundamental social and political transformations that characterize revolutions.

Poetry and Revolutions in 19th century

The latter half of the 19th century marked a significant turning point in which the roles of poet and revolutionary became intricately intertwined. José Martí was born in 1853, followed by José Rizal in 1861. Reflecting on the seventh decade of this century, we observe that the French Revolution was nearly three generations in the past, while the anarchist movement, as exemplified by the Russian Decembrists, had moved closer by thirty-five years. The revolution of 1848 remained vivid in the minds of many Europeans. The momentum generated by these pivotal events was poised to impact the colonies as well, although the challenges to authority manifested differently between Europe and its colonies during a period often referred to as the “Age of Revolution” (Hobsbawm, 1996).

Nevertheless, the essence of these struggles – frequently depicted in literary works – remained consistent until the close of the 19th century: a reaffirmation of national identity, a quest for liberation from the oppressive structures of the “Ancien Régime”, including absolute monarchy and the overwhelming power of the Church, alongside the emergence of a new liberal bourgeoisie. Figures such as José Martí and José Rizal rose prominently in this context, dedicating their efforts to educating the illiterate and impoverished masses while mobilizing them for national revolutions aimed at achieving independence and freedom.

The concepts of “masses” and “revolutions” have been intricately linked over the past two centuries. However, these two categories do not operate under the same paradigm. Revolutionary discourse often constructs and, at times, “creates” the idea of the “masses”, while the phenomenon of revolution also encompasses the realm of the individual hero or an enlightened vanguard. Whether revolutionary ideas are proclaimed from the back of a truck in an industrial area or disseminated in rural locations through rumors and other forms of oral communication, they ultimately stem from intellectual efforts.

It is undeniable that the masses are a by-product of these efforts, which include poems, novels, and theoretical writings – each serving as a weapon in its own right. We must emphasize that no revolution can exist without a guiding ideology, nor can any revolutionary leader remain untouched by the influence of preceding revolutionary thinkers or philosophers. It is essential to distinguish between revolutionary

4 “To speak today of Gabriel García Márquez, Salman Rushdie, Carlos Fuentes, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, and many others like them is to speak of a fairly novel emergent culture unthinkable without the earlier work of partisans like C.L.R. James, George Antonius, Edward Wilmont Blyden, W.E.B. Du Bois, José Martí” (Said, 1993, p. 243).

heroes, who commit themselves to the cause of overthrowing a conservative government or colonial rule, and revolutionary thinkers – writers and philosophers – who serve as apologists for their cause, much like the apostles of Christianity (Ness, 2009, p. 5-7).

It would be inappropriate to delve into the phenomenon of the often crude yet undeniably effective breed of demagogues – commonly referred to as populists – who seek to position themselves as revolutionary heroes. This trend spans from the radical agrarian populist movements of *narodnichestvo* in Russia and the People's Party in the United States to the Taiping Revolution led by Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864), a Hakka prophet who claimed to be the younger brother of Jesus Christ (Ballacci, 2025, p. 7).

While the term “demagogue” typically carries a negative connotation, it is evident that during the 19th century, these figures endeavored to present themselves as the champions of their eras. Their method for mobilizing the masses was quite straightforward: they employed rhetoric that intertwined fundamental truths, subtle insinuations, and direct confrontations with the established government, all while offering an abundance of appealing promises. Nonetheless, the central tenets of their discourse revolved around the liberation of the populace, along with the ideals of freedom and equality.

A thorough analysis of these provocative speeches reveals that, even today, a significant portion of political rhetoric is infused with concepts such as “freedom”, “justice” and “a call to action”. Ultimately, a radical populist notion of “democracy” is either explicitly mentioned or subtly implied. These paradigms are deeply rooted in the intellectual traditions of the late 18th and late 19th centuries, particularly within the frameworks of *Rousseauian* enlightenment and Franco-British-German Romanticism (Berlin, 1988, p. 38; Muller, 2016, p. 288).

During the late 19th century, amidst a backdrop of both failed and successful revolutions, it was rather uncommon to advocate for anything other than “democracy.” The Greek notion of “the people” became central to both revolutionaries and demagogues who sought to affiliate themselves with revolutionary ideals. Even the 19th-century Russian anarchists, epitomized by the failed Decembrist revolt of 1825, represented an extreme faction within this revolutionary movement. Their goal was to completely dismantle the existing social order, hoping to emerge from its ruins with a more equitable and civic-minded nation (Rabow-Edling, 2007, p. 369-391).

This desire mirrored also the aspirations of the Taiping Revolution in China and its referred mystical and populist leader, the young Hong Xiuquan. Presenting himself as the true descent brother of Jesus, Hong combined traditional peasant millenarianism with prophetic visions from Genesis to advocate for a new realm of justice and collective fraternity – ideas that were widely disseminated through revolutionary poems transformed into popular anthems and songs⁵. Ultimately, what unifies revolutionary discourses across diverse geographies is the belief that, even through their own profound struggles, people deserve a better fate. This conviction still resonates almost paradoxically with the principles Aristotle identified as fundamental to all demagogic discourse:

“[Demagogues] bring every question before the people, and make its decrees sovereign instead of the laws. This greatly enhances their personal power because, while the people is sovereign over all, they [the demagogue] rule over the people's opinion, since the multitude follows their lead... So if you were to say that such a democracy is not a constitution at all, your strictures would seem to be perfectly right” (Aristotle, 1992).

5 “Holding the Universe in the hand,/ I slay the evil, spare the righteous, and relieve the suffering of the people./ My eyes see through beyond the west, the north, the rivers, and the mountains,/ My sounds shake the east, the south, the Sun, and the Moon./ The glorious sword of authority was given by Lord,/ Poems and books are evidences that praise Yahweh in front of Him./ Taiping [perfect Peace] unifies the World of Light./ The domineering air will be joyous for myriads of thousand years” (Lee, 2003, p. 16-17).

Over two thousand years after Aristotle's era, the "age of revolutions" began to take shape. The foundation for this transformation was established during the 18th century. Jean-Jacques Rousseau emerged as a pivotal figure among revolutionary philosophers, often regarded alongside the most influential Western thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, and later, Marx, thus becoming a cornerstone of the modern revolutionary movement.

Notably, Rousseau did not advocate for armed conflict or the creation of a revolutionary military force to oppose governments. Instead, his writings emphasized the supremacy of legislative power over the executive and the importance of "social contract". His mid-18th century theory of "natural rights" quickly gained traction, sparking a surge of enthusiasm and a sense of solidarity among those reflecting on their roles in society (Furet & Hausser, 2012, p. 1101-1110; Vukadinovic, 2000, p. 207-220).

The Enlightenment, marked by innovative rationalist thinking and cultivated through social gatherings of like-minded individuals, set the stage for the significant French Revolution of 1789 and the ensuing series of uprisings across Europe, which would later extend into the 19th century. This wave of revolutions also impacted the American colonies of European powers, encapsulated by the concept articulated by the French historian Jacques Godechot, known as "Atlantic revolutions" (Godechot, 1956; Godechot, 1965; Klooster, 2023).

It would be quite far-fetched to assert that Greek philosophy emerged solely from a dialectical approach to reality. Similarly, it is not accurate to equate the Gymnasium with the intellectual gathering spaces of 19th-century Europe, which bore names such as "the Friends of the Country" or "Savant Society," and served as the intellectual engines behind revolutions. Whether these spaces housed societies that were, in some instances, synonymous with Masonic lodges or were comprised of solitary thinkers, the forefathers of revolutionary intellectualism included many young, passionate, and proud writers poised on the cusp of the 19th century.

They cultivated the ideas that would ultimately lead to the overthrow of governments. Engaging in discussions about the fundamental principles that governed society at that time became one of their favored pastimes. These moments of reflection and dialectical analysis became essential ingredients in the gunpowder of revolution. As Jacques Godechot observed, such activities played a significant role in diminishing the prestige of the most revered authorities: the kings, the churches, and the aristocrats. Across the board, they "undermined" the "Ancien Régime" and contributed to its eventual downfall (Godechot, 1965, p. 99).

Two figures that epitomize this context are José Martí from Cuba and José Rizal from the Philippines. Both are revered as national heroes for their opposition to the colonial Spanish regime, which was merely a remnant of the empire established by Philip II. They both lived during the latter half of the 19th century, a time when geographical distances between Europe, Americas and Asia began to be bridged by the transport revolutions –initially through steamships and later through the trains that permeated continents (Ewertowski, Forajter & Gromadzka, 2025).

Cultural distances were also diminished, a process aptly described by Benedict Anderson as the revolution of typographic capitalism (Anderson, 2006, p. 224). The modernization of printing presses, particularly the invention of the continuous-feed rotary press in 1843, significantly enhanced the distribution of countless journals, magazines, and pamphlets, along with a wide array of literature that could be produced in large volumes and sold at reasonable prices. These advancements in transportation and typography were intricately connected to an ongoing educational revolution that broadened literacy and improved access to primary education (Mayeur, 2004).

While further historical exploration of the similarities between these two poets and prose writers could lead to fascinating insights, it may also risk distancing the authors from their literary works. Thus, let us adopt a more focused approach and immerse ourselves in the rich landscape of literature. Our guiding question is: What revolutionary poetic ideas did these significant national figures express in their poetry? A succinct list of shared

poetic themes between Rizal and Martí would undoubtedly reflect the core essence of their political agendas and profound historical connections.

José Julián Martí Pérez was born in 1853 in Havana to Spanish parents; his father, Mariano Martí Navarro, hailed from Valencia, while his mother, Leonor Pérez Cabrera, originated from the Canary Islands. As the eldest of eight siblings, he was surrounded predominantly by female family members, having seven sisters. In contrast, José Rizal was born in 1861 into a mestizo family engaged in agricultural leasing, overseeing a hacienda and a rice farm under the ownership of the Dominican Order. He had one brother and nine sisters, placing both figures within large pre-industrial familial structures characterized by a matriarchal influence.

Martí's primary education began at the hands of Rafael María de Mendive, who would later serve as a mentor and protector. In 1865, he advanced to the *Escuela de Instrucción Primaria Superior Municipal*. Similarly, Rizal's early literacy was nurtured by his mother, enabling him to read and write by five, leading to his enrollment at the *Ateneo Municipal de Manila*. Both figures capitalized on the educational opportunities offered by municipal schools in Havana and Manila, respectively. Martí continued his academic pursuits by enrolling in the *Instituto de Segunda Enseñanza* in 1866 and later undertaking drawing classes at the *Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes San Alejandro* in 1867. He completed the second and third years of his bachelor's degree at San Pablo school, an institution managed by Mendive.

His literary contributions began in April 1868 when he published his inaugural poem, "A Micaela. En la muerte de Miguel Angel" in the newspaper *El Álbum*, dedicated to Mendive's wife. Rizal, conversely, graduated from the *Ateneo Municipal de Manila* as a distinguished student, earning a degree in land surveying with a preparatory law course at the University of Santo Tomás, achieving commendable academic results. His early prowess in poetry was established through various contests, with his first poem, "Sa Aking Mga Kabata" (To My Fellow Children), claimed to have been written at age eight in 1869.

However, its authenticity is contested among historians, as it was published posthumously, leading many to consider "Mi Primera Inspiración" (My First Inspiration), penned in Spanish in 1874 for his mother's birthday, as his first verifiable work (Veyra, 1946, p. IX-X). Despite their geographical distance, both Martí and Rizal emerged as prominent poets in their formative years, utilizing poetry as a significant intellectual vehicle of sociocultural promotion. They benefited from the typographic capitalism that thrived in the latter half of the 19th century, facilitating the widespread publication of numerous young writers across the globe.

In examining Martí's poem "A Micaela" alongside Rizal's "Mi Primera Inspiración," we discover a wealth of youthful poetic expressions, characterized by their naive romantic themes and vivid imagery. For example, the young José Rizal poses the question: "Why falls so rich a spray/ of fragrance from the bowers/ of the balmy flowers/ upon this festive day?" (Veyra, 1946, p. 2). These colorful lines from his first maternal poem invites readers to seek answers in José Martí's opening verses to Micaela, which poignantly reflect on the profound loss of her young son, Miguel Angel:

"On a night steeped in mourning,
The soul weeps for its sorrows,
Lamenting its misfortunes,
Grieving over its cares.
Sad tears flow,
Like pearls from the sea;

And that's why, Micaela,
 You weep with a heavy heart,
 With no one able to console your pain
 Or quiet your sobs.
 And that's why, Micaela,
 In your profound maternal grief,
 You continually weep, you endlessly moan
*For the loss of Miguel Angel*⁶

These two works, anchored in a maternal theme and rich in romantic motifs, present poetry as a powerful medium for the exploration of profound personal and cultural ideas. They invite an expression liberated from pain and suffering, whether it pertains to an individual or the deep grief associated with one's motherland: this is *the idea*. Since the Renaissance, the concept of "the idea" has been defined by Tasso as a transcendent truth that is reflected in poetry as a central notion (Briggs, 1930, p. 457-473; Tasso, 1999).

From this perspective, the Romantic movement in Europe introduced a new form of poetry known as *Gedankenlyrik*, or "poetry of ideas" or "philosophical poetry" (Mathieu & Stern, 1987, p. 149). Exploring these "poetical ideas" can significantly contribute to our understanding of the revolutionary literary profiles of Rizal and Martí. However, poetry is not the sole medium for such a forensic examination of literature. The novels of Rizal and Martí also provide a rich array of themes that enhance our comprehension of the political landscapes in which the authors operated and their perspectives on society.

A thorough study of the poetical ideas in their poetry, combined with an analysis of themes in their prose, should acknowledge that art serves both a transitive purpose (communicating a message developed through contemplation) and a reflexive one. It is this reflexive quality of literary texts that allows us to create the most accurate portrayal of these two revolutionary figures.

Novels are often regarded as transitive due to their narrative structure, as authors frequently reveal themselves through echoes in the narrative voice or the perspectives of central characters. In contrast, poetry is commonly seen as a "mirror of the soul," rendering it more suitable for reflective evaluation. Both Rizal and Martí have created works in both genres (Martí, 1963); however, it is primarily through their poetry that we can readily identify significant themes that contribute to a vivid portrayal. The question of whether this depiction aligns with that of other late Romantic revolutionary figures is secondary to this analysis. It is also important to note that within a novel – considered a narrative subgenre of the epic – there are stylistic elements that intertwine with poetry. Nonetheless, it is our perception of the poems that may unveil themes through which we can discern the poets' most profound obsessions and intimate convictions, ultimately serving as a foundation for interpreting their works as revolutionary writings.

Rizal Poetry and Revolutionary cultural artistry

Throughout his 35 years of life, José Rizal emerged as an exceptionally prolific and versatile writer. He bequeathed to us foundational novels such as *Noli Me Tángere* ("Touch Me Not," 1887) and *El Filibusterismo* (1891). Furthermore, he published an annotated edition of Antonio de Morga's *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*

6 Translation by the authors from the original Martí, 1868, p. 1.

(1890), authored folk tales and children's stories like *Si Pagong at si Matsing* (The Turtle and the Monkey), and contributed scientific papers across various fields, including ophthalmology, linguistics, and anthropology.

Rizal also edited plays such as "The Council of Gods," "Beside the Pasig" (Junto al Pasig), a zarzuela performed during the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and "Saint Eustaquio, Martyr," which is based on a legend of St. Eustace. His pursuits extended to translations, painting, and sculpture; however, it is his poetry that continues to captivate and challenge researchers. Jaime Carlos de Veyra served as the Resident Commissioner to the U. S. House of Representatives from the Philippine Islands from 1917 to 1923. He was the head of the Spanish department at the University of the Philippines from 1925 to 1936 and directed the Institute of National Language from 1937 to 1944. From 1946 until his death in 1963, he worked as a historical researcher in charge of manuscripts and publications at the National Library in Manila, dedicating part of his efforts to collecting Rizal's poems⁷.

He published 40 collected in both printed and manuscript forms (Veyra, 1946). Despite his extensive expertise and privileged access to various sources, there may still be undiscovered poems among the correspondence and papers from the multitude of places and individuals Rizal encountered. In this vast poetic collection, let us delve into the texts that embody *the idea*.

José Rizal's sonnet "To the Philippines," composed in 1880 – two years prior to his departure for Spain – references the "cultured West" (Veyra, 1946, p. 33)⁸. The poem serves as an ode to the Motherland, which is evocatively compared to a highly cultivated Romantic icon – the Moon. Beyond the inherent melancholy of this symbol, Rizal incorporates another element associated with the moon within the Romantic symbolic framework: the goddess.

Consequently, the image of the Motherland is portrayed in dark shades of blue and grey, as if she is a goddess ensnared by an unseen curse. What, then, is the role of the "cultured West" in this context? It stands in stark contrast to what it professes. The poem adopts a seemingly laudatory tone towards Western civilization; however, its true intention is quite the opposite. While the West may be considered "cultural," it is also depicted in a way that reveals its heartlessness:

"The cultured West adores her smile
And the frosty Pole her flow'rd attire"
(Veyra, 1946, p. 33)

Rizal employs a couple of similes that, while not perfectly symmetrical, belong to the same thematic framework. The West venerates the joy associated with the goddess of motherland, whereas the Pole cherishes the beauty of flowers. Both entities yearn for what they lack. The West, influenced by the qualities of the "frosty Pole", emerges as icy and indifferent, betraying a heartlessness.

In that often-discussed poem later referred to as "Our Mother Tongue," originally written in Tagalog and titled "Sa Aking Mga Kabata" ("To My Fellow Children"), Rizal emphasizes that the Tagalog language is "akin to Latin,

⁷ *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*: De Veyra, Jaime C., 1873-1963. Available at: <https://www.bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/D000276>.

⁸ A traditional version of the poem is also available at <https://www.ioserizal.ph/pm04.html>; and a modern reading at <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/to-the-philippines/>.

English, and Spanish”⁹. This idea reflects an Enlightenment belief that mastering one’s native language embodies more than just an advantage over those who are less literate in society.

“Because by its language one can judge
A town, a barrio, and kingdom;
And like any other created thing
Every human being loves his freedom.”
(Veyra, 1946, p. 1)

As a true poet, José Rizal understands that a poetic *idea* should be emphasized multiple times within the same poem, employing various modes of expression. In “Our Mother Tongue,” he articulates the theme of the “joy of the Philippines in the face of the icy cold West” from his previous work, highlighting the freedom to use a cultural language effectively, which allows the Philippines to stand as equals alongside any Western nation. This bold idea emerged during an era when empires were viewed as paragons of civilization, while colonies were often regarded merely as backward trading outposts.

Even more audacious is a poetic concept that directs the reader to a myth central to romanticism, particularly in Rousseau’s writings: *le bon sauvage*¹⁰. One of the most renowned quotes from his work encapsulates the following generous yet paternalistic principle: “La nature a fait l’homme heureux et bon, mais la société le déprave et le rend misérable”¹¹. For Rousseau, a life of luxury leads to the corruption of the soul. Therefore, it was crucial for the romantic poet to seek a return to nature, reminding others that the only era of authenticity – the age of innocent childhood – has long been lost to Western civilization. Rizal embarks on this romantic young poetic journey in his “Memories of My Town” (Un Recuerdo a Mi Pueblo):

“Oh, yes! With uncertain pace
I trod your forest lands,
And on your river banks
A pleasant fun I found;
At your rustic temple I prayed
With a little boy’s simple faith
And your aura’s flawless breath
Filled my heart with joy profound.
Saw I god in the grandeur
Of your woods which for centuries stand;
Never did I understand
In your bosom what sorrows were;
While I gazed on your azure sky

9 “La lengua tagala es también como la latina,/ la inglesa, la castellana; lengua de ángeles./ porque Dios, que vela por todos,/ es el que de ella nos hizo merced [The Tagalog language is also like Latin,/ English, and Castilian; the language of angels./ because God, who watches over all/ is the one who gave us grace through it.] (Veyra, 1946, p. 1).

10 Although the term “good savage” is often linked to Rousseau, his writings do not actually employ this concept. Instead, he utilizes the notions of “bon état naturel,” “bonté naturelle,” or “de bonne nature,” which are elaborated upon in his renowned work, *Émile ou De l’éducation*, published in 1762 (Marceau, 1971, p. 30-33).

11 “Nature has made man happy and good, but society depraves him and makes him miserable” (Rousseau, 1780, p. 305).

Neither love nor tenderness
 Failed me, 'cause my happiness
 In the heart of nature rests there."
 (Veyra, 1946, p. 4; Rizal, 1876)

There is no doubt that in this poem of "memories," Rizal employs a technique that goes beyond merely playing with similes or epithets; he meticulously accumulates information, culminating in a richly nuanced poetic idea. The imagery of forests as temples and the child as the faithful believer converge in the final fragment of the poem, where the adult poet comes to terms with the self-inflicted, yet unrelenting, sin of having lost his childhood. These spaces of serenity and belief are simultaneously governed by a benevolent genius. For many Romantics, God was perceived as distant, intangible, and inert:

"Tender childhood, beautiful town,
 Rich fountain of happiness,
 Of harmonious melodies,
 That drive away my heart,
 Bring back my gentle hours
 As do the birds when the flow'rs
 Would again begin to blow!
 But, alas, adieu! E'er watch
 For your peace, joy and response,
 Genius of good who kindly dispose
 Of his blessings with amour;
 It's for thee my fervent pray'rs,
 It's for thee my constant desire
 Knowledge ever to acquire
 And may God keep your candour!"
 (Veyra, 1946, p. 4)

Opposed to the political rulers, the true forces in the physical world were of transcendental origin: the geniuses. Their temples were the forests, and their kingdom resided in the hearts of children. In the language of the romantics, society was depicted as composed of deprived and miserable individuals, a portrayal that clearly refers to Western society. The underlying message of this poem is that the Filipino people possess a significant advantage over Westerners, as they have maintained their original candor.

The meaningful poetic themes found in the warmth of the Filipino spirit, the beauty of the Tagalog language, and the sincerity of indigenous peoples serve as a powerful testament. This testament advocates for the inherent freedom of the Filipino spirit, suggesting that political liberation will inevitably follow. This idea can be seen in the renowned poem by Rizal, "To the Philippine Youth", penned in 1879, where an apparent submission to Spanish merciful authority is expressed:

“See that in the ardent zone
 The Spaniard, where shadow stand,
 Doth offer a shining crown
 With wise and merciful hand
 To the son of this Indian land”
 (Veyra, 1946, p. 31; Rizal, 1879)

The message is unmistakable: the imperial power assumes the role of a paternal figure to the “Indian” children. Toward the end of the poem, after earnestly praising the ingenuity, vibrant spirits, and creative potential of the youth, José Rizal underscores what is essential for a genuine revolution. Although the poem appears to focus solely on “the artist”, it incorporates symbols that reveal the true identity of the poet as a revolutionary writer. He is blessed with “genius”, awaits his “crowning”, and is destined to “spread the fame”. Ultimately, he stands as a leader among the enthusiastic youth:

“Run! For genius’ sacred flame
 Awaits the artist’s crowning
 Spreading far and wide the fame
 Throughout the sphere proclaiming
 With trumpet the mortal’s name.
 Oh, joyful, joyful day,
 The Almighty blessed be
 Who, with loving eagerness
 Sends you luck and happiness”
 (Veyra, 1946, p. 32)

The “artist” described here does not truly capture the essence of an artist. Instead, he resembles a revolutionary who, influenced by Western culture, has become fortunate and famous. Now, he can implement the ideas that were hinted at the beginning of the poem:

“Lift up your radiant brow,
 This day, Youth of my native strand!
 Your abounding talents show
 Resplendently and grand,
 Fair hope of my Motherland!”
 (Veyra, 1946, p. 32)

The young “artists” will ultimately evolve into true artists, a transformation that will only occur with the liberation and independence of the Motherland. Central to this idea is the Motherland, depicted as a goddess, through which Rizal’s poetry endeavors to reorganize the universe into a new poetic order. This endeavor itself represents a revolutionary concept, as the “genius” of the poet shapes the world of the Motherland, distancing it from the cold confines of Western civilization. The moment for achieving national identity through education appears to have arrived, and like a genuine Romantic hero, the poet serves to sound the call that unites the Filipinos.

José Martí – Revolutionary anthem poetics

It is clear that the diversity in José Martí's body of work is not as pronounced as that found in José Rizal's repertoire. While Martí was a prolific journalist and publicist, accumulating a substantial amount of correspondence, he authored only one novel, "Lucía Jerez," initially titled "Amistad Funesta" (Regrettable Friendship).

His poetry is extensive, having been written since he was just 15 years old. However, quantifying the exact number of poems Martí composed proves challenging due to the vast scope of both his published and unpublished works. His notable published poetry collections include: "Versos Sencillos" (Simple Verses, 1891), which features 46 untitled poems; "Ismaelillo" (1882), a collection of 15 poems dedicated to his son; and "Versos Libres" (Free Verses, 1878-1882), a series created during his time in exile. These collections primarily consist of brief poems, many of which have not received widespread recognition. In contrast, Martí's essays have achieved significant acclaim, particularly his renowned essay "Our America," along with important works such as "My Race" and the "Montecristi Manifesto" (Martí, 2002).

Martí produced a remarkable body of poetry during his lifetime, likely exceeding five hundred poems that have yet to be fully catalogued, edited, and studied. He has inspired more revolutionaries around the world than Rizal, not merely because of his extensive poetic output, but primarily due to a particular poem that was adapted into a song. Throughout the 20th century, "Guantanamera" emerged as a prominent revolutionary anthem, drawing from selected stanzas of Martí's opening poem in "Simple Verses," his final collection of published literary works, which was released in New York in 1891 (Martí, 1891).

While the song has gained immense popularity and widespread recognition, it is important to acknowledge that its lyrics do not capture the full length, rhythm, and richly varied nuances of the original poem's intricate structure and complex meanings. Distressed by Cuba's tragic fate and living in exile, Martí explains in the prologue to this last poetic work that "these verses came from my heart" (me salieron estos versos del corazón) and that he was inspired to write them after "my doctor threw me into the mountains; streams ran and clouds closed in: I wrote verses." This led to a poignant, densely populated text that is both profound and strikingly contradictory, filled with contrasting images: "sometimes the sea roars and the wave crashes in the black night against the rocks of the bloody castle; sometimes the bee whispers as it prowls among the flowers" (Martí, 1891, p. 7-8).

The romantic anguish surrounding death at the heart of the first poem of *Versos sencillos* is expressed in two distinct ways: first, as a result of the world's failure to evolve in line with the ideals of the romantic hero, which reflects the poet's own sacrifice; and second, as a manifestation of sacrificial love. Within the context of Romantic sensibility –our focus here – one can observe a progression from the revolutionary concept of death articulated by William Blake, who asserted, "I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's" (Blake, s/d), to the prevalent theme in Goethe's *Sturm und Drang* movement, which nearly glorified the notion of suicide for love, as seen in the famous work, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (Goethe, 1774). Regardless of the viewpoint, Martí embodies the romantic hero, skillfully navigating these extremes in "A Sincere Man Am I" (Yo soy un hombre sincero), the poem opening that gained notoriety through the well-loved *Guantanamera* song:

"A sincere man am I
From the land where palm trees grow,
And I want before I die
My soul's verses to bestow."
(Martí, 1891, p. 11)

Beginning with a verse that expresses a personal declaration of sincerity, the lines swiftly and inevitably navigate towards the intricate realms of morbidity, transcending reality to reformulate into a poetic testament. The verses intensify the unsettling imagery, evoking an almost ghostly essence of the soul that flits through, subtly hinting at the death of the father – a recurring motif of both paternal loss and the loss of the homeland:

“I have known a man to live
With a dagger at his side,
And never once the name give
Of she by whose hand he died.

Twice, for an instant, did I
My soul's reflection espy:
Twice: when my poor father died
And when she bade me good-bye.”
(Martí, 1891, p. 12)

In this intricately poetic journey, an update intended to revolutionize the mysticism of *contemptus mundi* strives to elevate the poetic self beyond itself. When the poet reflects on his own faith, he ultimately opts to make a sacrifice far greater than the mere flesh and bones of the mortal body:

“My heart holds anguish and pains
From a wound which festers and cries
The son of a people in chains
Lives for them, hushes, and dies.
All is lovely and right
All is reason and song
Before the diamond is bright
Its night of carbon is long.
I know that the foolish may die
With burial pomp and tears
And that no land can supply
The fruit which the graveyard bears.
Silent, I quit the renown
And boast of a poet's rhyme
And rest my doctoral gown
On a tree withered with time.”
(Martí, 1891, p. 14)

José Martí's journeys through Central America in 1877 gave rise to one of the most enduring myths about his private life: the legend of María García Granados, a gifted pianist and daughter of former Guatemalan President Miguel García Granados. Martí dedicated several poems to her, and it is said that she died as a result of his unrequited love. Shortly after their first meeting, on April 27, 1887, when Martí was 24 and María was

just 16, he penned the poem “María”. One of its stanzas captures his admiration: “I feel a light that seems like a star, / I hear a voice that sounds like a melody, / And I see a gentle maiden rise, / So modest, so beautiful that she is called María!”

Their relationship blossomed over eight brief yet intense months. In December 1877, Martí returned to Mexico and formally married Carmen Zayas Bazán on the 20th of that month. By January of the following year, he was back in Guatemala, this time with his wife, and he did not visit the García Granados home again. Tragically, María passed away from a respiratory illness on May 10, at the young age of 17, shortly after swimming in a nearby river (Martí, 1913, p. 81-84).

Legend has it that the young Guatemalan woman “died of love,” a myth strongly endorsed by Martí himself. Several years after the event, in August 1891, his collection of *Versos sencillos* features the renowned Poem IX, titled “La Niña de Guatemala,” in which the Cuban poet portrays the recreated girl’s tragic demise stemming from unrequited love. This poem embodies the themes and imagery characteristic of Romanticism, employing a concise yet impactful style to emphasize deep emotional resonance. Each stanza explores a different aspect of the young woman’s narrative, culminating in the poignant climax of her death. The haunting refrain, “ella se murió de amor” (she died of love), emphasizes the relentless nature of her suffering. This work not only offers deep insights into the poetics of charged morbidity but also highlights the shared sensibilities of Martí and Rizal, rendering further commentary unnecessary; it is enough to engage with these exemplary verses appreciatively, as they could easily inspire a love song that would undoubtedly achieve popularity:

“I want, in the shadow of a wing,
tell this tale in bloom:
the girl from Guatemala,
the one who died of love.

The bouquets were of lilies;
and the borders of reseda
and jasmine; we buried her
in a silk box;

She gave the forgetful
a scent pad;
he came back, he came back married;
she died of love.

They were carrying her on a stretcher
bishops and ambassadors;
behind was the people in batches,
all laden with flowers;

She, to see him again,
he went out to see him at the lookout;
he came back with his wife,
she died of love.

Like burning bronze,
to the goodbye kiss,
it was his forehead - the forehead
What have I loved the most in my life?

He entered the river in the afternoon,
the doctor took her out dead;
They say he died of cold
I know that he died of love.

There, in the frozen vault,
They put her on two benches:
I kissed her sharp hand,
I kissed her white shoes.

Silent, at dusk,
the undertaker called me;
I have never seen again
the one who died of love”
(Martí, 1891, p. 78-79)

Poetry for failed Revolutions as a heroic Death and last Farewells

Martí and Rizal were both poets of failed revolutions to which they gave their lives. On May 19, 1895, José Martí found himself in one of the Cuban camps located in the *Dos Ríos* area. While riding alongside Second Lieutenant Ángel de la Guardia, he was ambushed by a group of Spanish soldiers concealed in the underbrush. The renowned apostle of independence was struck by three bullets: one pierced his chest, fracturing his sternum; another went through his chin, shattering his upper lip as it exited; and the final bullet hit his thigh, resulting in his immediate death.

Upon receiving the tragic news, Máximo Gómez, Commander-in-Chief of the island's revolutionary forces and a close friend of Martí, rushed to recover his body. However, the Spanish had already taken control of his remains, seizing several of his belongings and money, which they used to purchase tobacco and eau de parfum. Thus, Martí's life came to a premature end on the battlefield, where he valiantly fought for the cause that had consumed his most significant years, at the age of just 42 (López, 2016, p. 265-282).

A little over a year later, at the end of 1896, José Rizal was executed. After being arrested in Barcelona on October 6, 1896, Rizal was transported back to Manila aboard the troop ship *Cristóbal Colón*, where he was to be placed at the disposal of the colonial authorities in the archipelago. Upon his arrival, Captain General Camilo García de Polavieja y del Castillo-Negrete, the recently appointed Governor General of the Philippines, showed no hesitation and ordered Rizal's execution.

On December 30, 1896, at 7:03 a.m., his life was taken by bullets. He requested not to be blindfolded but was denied the chance to look at his executioners. Labelled a “traitor,” he was compelled to be shot from behind. However, he turned just in time to face the firing squad before the shots struck him in the chest. He was 35 (Coates, 1992, p. 329-331).

Less than two years later, Spain lost both Cuba and the Philippines in the wake of the Spanish-American War, plunging into a cultural, political, and social collective depression that would be reflected in the literary Generation of '98. The destinies of these two island nations grew even more intertwined under the victorious U.S. control despite their geographical separation. After the war, U.S. forces occupied Cuba until 1902, when the United States permitted a new Cuban government to assume full control of its affairs, albeit while maintaining significant oversight. Meanwhile, the U.S. occupation of the Philippines lasted nearly 50 years, from 1898 to 1946.

Rizal and Martí are difficult to compare solely based on their poetic styles. Nonetheless, both poets belonged to the same tradition. Despite the diversity in their writings, they shared a common objective: to end Spanish colonial domination through the education of the masses. The subsequent transformation of the social order would be realized by readers in the generations to come. They were both products of the Romantic era, a time when poetry served as a nuanced vehicle for conveying meaning. A central poetic idea of this period was the necessity of changing the colonial order.

During the time of Rizal and Martí, poets embodied the essence of their craft; poetry was not just an art form but also a conduit for profound messages that planted the seeds of revolutionary thought. Once the poet's work was done, the heroes of revolution began to emerge. Martí insightfully expressed this sentiment in his poem "I have a white rose to tend" (*Cultivo una rosa blanca*), which beautifully intertwined romantic ideals of poetry with themes of resistance, merging verses and revolution to promise a new era of human regeneration and a spirit of generous forgiveness.

"I have a white rose to tend
In July as in January;
I give it to the true friend
Who offers his frank hand to me.
And for the cruel one whose blows
Break the heart by which I live,
Thistle nor thorn do I give:
For him, too, I have a white rose."

This poetry is dedicated to the revolutions of tomorrow, transcending mere authorship to achieve a timeless resonance through a sacrificial and heroic death, embodying an arcane sacred martyrdom that profoundly unites their poetries. It reconnects themes and content independently of formal preferences. It is the idea – the poetic idea as well as the very concept of poetry – that binds them more than their shared chronology or their mutual demise at the hands of the same Spanish foe within the same historical context.

Strikingly, and perhaps intentionally, Martí and Rizal gifted us with fundamental farewell poems that are both poignant and expressive. They were acutely aware that they would sacrifice their lives for the revolution yet to come. Martí penned his farewell poem in simple verses, four years before his assassination in Cuba, while Rizal completed his poetic farewell merely hours before his execution.

Martí's farewell poem, titled "Yo quiero salir del mundo" (I Want to Leave the World), was published also in 1891 as part of that final collection of *Versos sencillos*. The poem expresses a yearning for a natural death and burial, emphasizing a rejection of societal conventions and a longing for communion with nature. Notable for its brevity and clarity, it delivers a profound message about the inevitability of death, with the condition that one should pass "with my face to the sun," as a radical refusal to die as a traitor:

"I wish to leave the world
 I wish to leave the world
 By its natural door;
 In my tomb of green leaves
 They are to carry me to die.
 Do not put me in the dark
 To die like a traitor;
 I am good, and like a good thing
 I will die with my face to the sun"
 (Martí, 1891, p. 47)

The famous poem "Mi Último Adiós" (My Final Farewell), penned by José Rizal in Fort Santiago on the eve of his execution by the Spanish as a "traitor," stands as one of the great monuments of nationalist and revolutionary poetry from the late 19th century. It is a lesson to a future generation of poets who would transform into revolutionaries, striving to establish free and independent nations.

This powerful piece expresses Rizal's deep patriotic devotion to the Philippines. He views his imminent death not with fear, but with joy, perceiving it as the ultimate act of love and service to his homeland. Rizal sees his execution as a necessary sacrifice for the greater good and the liberation of his people. The poem envisions a hopeful future, echoing the sentiments of Martí's farewell and projecting a vision in which the Philippines achieves freedom and thrives as nation. His farewell serves as a timeless call to future generations, urging them to persist in their struggle against oppression and to maintain hope in their pursuit of justice and independence.

As a concluding revolutionary act, Rizal completed the poem in his prison cell the night before his execution, famously concealing it in a gas lamp to be given to his sister. The poem's blend of solemnity and hope, patriotism and sacrifice, has solidified its status as a timeless masterpiece that continues to inspire and uplift Filipinos as well as people around the world. It is a work that can only be fully appreciated when read in its entirety.

"Farewell, my adored Land, region of the sun caressed,
 Pearl of the Orient Sea, our Eden lost,
 With gladness I give you my Life, sad and repressed;
 And were it more brilliant, more fresh and at its best,
 I would still give it to you for your welfare at most.

On the fields of battle, in the fury of fight,
 Others give you their lives without pain or hesitancy,
 The place does not matter: cypress laurel, lily white,
 Scaffold, open field, conflict or martyrdom's site,
 It is the same if asked by home and Country.

I die as I see tints on the sky b'gin to show
 And at last announce the day, after a gloomy night;
 If you need a hue to dye your mutational at the right moment spread it so,
 And gild it with a reflection of your nascent light!

My dreams, when scarcely a lad adolescent,
 My dreams when already a youth, full of vigor to attain,
 Were to see you, gem of the sea of the Orient,
 Your dark eyes dry, smooth brow held to a high plane
 Without frown, without wrinkles and of shame without stain.

My life's fancy, my ardent, passionate desire,
 Hail! Cries out the soul to you, that will soon part from thee;
 Hail! How sweet 'tis to fall that fullness you may acquire;
 To die to give you life, 'neath your skies to expire,
 And in your mystic land to sleep through eternity!

If over my tomb some day, you would see blow,
 A simple humble flow'r amidst thick grasses,
 Bring it up to your lips and kiss my soul so,
 And under the cold tomb, I may feel on my brow,
 Warmth of your breath, a whiff of your tenderness.

Let the moon with soft, gentle light me descry,
 Let the dawn send forth its fleeting, brilliant light,
 In murmurs grave allow the wind to sigh,
 And should a bird descend on my cross and alight,
 Let the bird intone a song of peace o'er my site.

Let the burning sun the raindrops vaporize
 And with my clamor behind return pure to the sky;
 Let a friend shed tears over my early demise;
 And on quiet afternoons when one prays for me on high,
 Pray too, oh, my Motherland, that in God may rest I.

Pray thee for all the hapless who have died,
 For all those who unequalled torments have undergone;
 For our poor mothers who in bitterness have cried;
 For orphans, widows and captives to tortures were shied,
 And pray too that you may see you own redemption.

And when the dark night wraps the cemet'ry
 And only the dead to vigil there are left alone,
 Don't disturb their repose, don't disturb the mystery:
 If you hear the sounds of cithern or psaltery,
 It is I, dear Country, who, a song t'you intone.

And when my grave by all is no more remembered,
 With neither cross nor stone to mark its place,
 Let it be plowed by man, with spade let it be scattered
 And my ashes ere to nothingness are restored,
 Let them turn to dust to cover your earthly space.

Then it doesn't matter that you should forget me:
 Your atmosphere, your skies, your vales I'll sweep;
 Vibrant and clear note to your ears I shall be:
 Aroma, light, hues, murmur, song, moanings deep,
 Constantly repeating the essence of the faith I keep.

My idolized Country, for whom I most gravely pine,
 Dear Philippines, to my last goodbye, oh, harken
 There I leave all: my parents, loves of mine,
 I'll go where there are no slaves, tyrants or hangmen
 Where faith does not kill and where God alone does reign.

Farewell, parents, brothers, beloved by me,
 Friends of my childhood, in the home distressed;
 Give thanks that now I rest from the wearisome day;
 Farewell, sweet stranger, my friend, who brightened my way;
 Farewell, to all I love. To die is to rest."

It is indeed true that this lengthy and profound farewell poem has been adapted into various musical forms, including songs, choral arrangements, and symphonic works. Composers such as Ryan Cayabyab have set it to music for the musical "Illustrated," while Jose Estella has created a Symphonic Ode based on it. Despite these accomplishments, it has never come close to achieving the popularity of "Guantanamera." The dramatic depth and aesthetic romanticism of José Rizal's last poem illuminate the complex relationship between poetry and revolution, indicating that this connection is far from straightforward or linear. Poetry appears to be the literary form most effectively aligned with revolutionary fervor, generating a literary expression that resonates deeply with the actions of revolutionaries during times of crisis.

In contrast, resistance, insurgency, and revolution tend to produce their narratives retrospectively, but their poetry often emerges in the heat of the moment. Furthermore, unlike policy papers or doctrinal treatises, poems are compact, memorable, and emotionally evocative. A poem can be inscribed on a street wall, carried in one's pocket, recited in prison, or chanted during a protest march. It bypasses rational defenses and speaks directly to a mystical heart or metaphysical soul. "Mi Último Adiós" serves as a reminder that, even when the dust of failed revolutions settles, it is the poems that inspire visions of a new world to come.

Although the poetry that initially appears most effective for a revolution derives its power from the nature of poetic language – essentially at odds with the language of action – it can address all humanity precisely because it does not command specific actions beyond the poignant proclamation that "morir es descansar" (to die is to rest).

The message of poetic eschatological martyrdom conveyed in the verses of “Mi Último Adiós” has significantly influenced the independence revolutions in Southeast Asia through its numerous translations and editions in Malay, Chinese, and especially Bahasa Indonesia, circulated during the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. A pioneering Indonesian nationalist, Ernest François Eugène Douwes Dekker (1879-1950), who was of Indonesian-Dutch descent, regarded Rizal as a symbol of anti-colonial resistance and an exemplary model of mestizo nationalism that ought to flourish in Southeast Asia. He believed that the independence movements in Indonesia and other Southeast Asian nations required leadership from cultured and educated mestizo figures like José Rizal to achieve success, much like the independence movements in South America during the early 19th century (Veur, 2021).

The Indonesian Revolution, which commenced in 1945, did not explicitly hinge on an acquaintance with José Rizal or his iconic final poem. However, Rizal's legacy and his remarkable work served as a source of inspiration for many in the revolutionary generation. The repeated engagement of revolutionary pemuda – young nationalists who claimed Rizal's translation to Indonesian as their own text in 1944 in Jakarta, in 1945 in Surabaya, and in 1946 in Mojokerto – illustrates how Indonesian independence fighters, during a time of significant peril, drew motivation from a powerful poem that promised a meaningful, even glorious, martyrdom. This may explain why the esteemed Indonesian writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925-2006) chose to reference Rizal in the second volume of his acclaimed literary tetralogy, the *Buru Quartet*. This volume, aptly titled “Child of All Nations”, serves as an extraordinary novel that aims to provide readers with a profound understanding of the colonial mentality that permeated the so-called Dutch East Indies and the journey toward independence.

In this remarkable literary work, the central character, Minke – who also adopts the pseudonym Max Tollenaar – is a distinctive native Javanese with a formal Dutch education. As a widow, he is initially depicted as naive, unpatriotic, and even arrogant toward his own people. During a voyage aboard the ship *Oosthoek*, he encounters a Dutch radical named Ter Haar, who is on his way to work for *De Locomotief*, the first newspaper published in Semarang since 1845. Ter Haar enlightens Minke about the complexities of the world, unveiling the driving forces of capital, imperialism, and greed. He cites the Philippines as an example of successful resistance and urges Minke to liberate his mind from colonial constraints. By emphasizing the revolutionary path taken by the Filipinos, Ter Haar presents it as a potential aspiration for Minke and the Dutch East Indies in their pursuit of national independence. In the novel, he articulates:

“The Filipinos have already carried out strikes”, said Ter Haar. “But their rebellion is even more interesting; it rocked all of Europe, including Holland, Mr. Minke.” He hurriedly lit another cigarette. “They're all busy studying why it happened so they can make sure nothing similar occurs in their own colonies. A friend of mine knew one of the Native leaders there, someone called Dr. José Rizal. My friend met him in Prague. Rizal was a poet, very brilliant, and a fiery lover also. The Spanish caught him in the end. A great pity – someone as outstanding as that. His faith wasn't strong enough. A pity.” He smacked his lips. “Of course there can be no doubt now about his fate: The death sentence ended his life story. Someone as cultivated as that, writing poems in Spanish, just as you write in Dutch. A doctor, Mr. Tollenaar, and you too intend to become a doctor. Perhaps that is no coincidence: Somebody educated, a doctor, a poet...rebellious.” (Toer, 1979, p. 264)

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